

# A P-3C Flap Delivers a Knockout Punch

By AM2 Greg Tucker

It was just another cold, windy night on deployment. Three other airframers and I were working our normal night-check routine when maintenance control issued a daily on a P-3C. My co-workers checked out the tools, and I grabbed the maintenance ladder. We cautiously walked out of the hangar and down the icy flight line to the aircraft.

As I walked around the port wing of the Orion, I positioned the ladder behind the port flap-well area, so I could use the ladder to clean and to check servicing of the hydraulic-servicing center. As a normal part of every P-3C daily check, we would turn up the auxiliary-power unit and lower the flaps for inspection.

Our CDI shift supervisor positioned himself in the flight station to serve as the flap operator. Another observer posted himself forward of the aircraft, and I moved under the starboard wing to serve as the aft observer. After a quick look at the flap-extension danger area, I thought the area was clear of all obstructions. Unfortunately, I failed to notice the maintenance ladder in this area.

Believing my inspection complete, I gave the forward observer the OK signal to lower the flaps. As the flaps were extending, I did not notice one hit the maintenance ladder. After both flaps were completely extended, I walked under the aircraft and saw two of the ladder's legs were off the ground. I looked up and



Both views of this flap crunch are necessary to gauge the damage.



noticed the inboard trailing edge of the port flap had extended down onto the ladder, creating a 3-inch-by-3-inch rip in the trailing edge. At first, I had hoped this was just a terrible nightmare; however, reality quickly set in, and I knew the aircraft had been damaged.

I immediately gave the "hands off" signal to the forward observer, who, in turn, signaled the same to the flight-station observer. Hydraulic power was secured, and we quickly notified maintenance control.

After a thorough inspection and investigation, it turned out the damage was minimal, requiring only 12 maintenance hours to repair the tear. The flap strike had missed a flap rib by a mere 7 inches! Had the ladder hit this rib, a Class C mishap would have resulted.

Our squadron had been on deployment for three months—just long enough to feel comfortable in our new environment. This sensitive time is when a mishap most likely will occur. Sailors start to let down their guard and to allow a lax mindset to take hold, clouding their decision-making.

Our squadron's SOPs are clear regarding wing-flap extension. Three people are required during the evolution, and my job was to make sure the flap-extension danger area was clear of any gear. I failed to spot the ladder, and this incident served as a valuable reminder to my squadron and shipmates that complacency can strike in any operating environment, no matter how mundane or routine a task might seem.

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